



As drug trafficking undermines peace and security, UN calls for global measures



Marijuana plants

8 December 2009 – The Security Council today called for greater international cooperation in fighting drug trafficking, with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon terming it a leading threat to global peace and security.

“So far, cooperation between governments is lagging behind cooperation between organized crime networks,” he **told** the 15-member body at the start of a day-long debate.

Drug trafficking is fuelling brutal insurgencies in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Myanmar, spreading violence in West Africa, Central Asia, Central America and the Caribbean and threatening to reverse UN peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan, Haiti, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere, he warned.

UN Office on Drugs and Crime (**UNODC**) Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa said Africa serves not only for trans-shipment but also as a production and consumption centre, with drug routes now meeting in the Sahara, jet planes replacing traditional camel caravans, and terrorists and anti-government forces funding their activities from the illicit profits, just as they have done in West Asia and the Andean region.

In a presidential statement at the start of the debate, in which nearly 40 countries and regional representatives were scheduled to speak, the Council called for reinforced coordination of UN actions with the global police organization Interpol and regional and sub-regional organizations, citing Africa by name.

"Drug trafficking is evolving into an ever graver threat that is affecting all regions of the world," Mr Ban warned, calling for sustained political will and significant resources to counter the trade, which in some countries generates huge profits that can rival gross the domestic product.

"The trans-national nature of the threat means that no country can face it alone. This fight requires a comprehensive international approach based on a strong sense of shared responsibility. States must share intelligence, carry out joint operations, build capacity, and provide mutual legal assistance," he added.

He called for a more balanced approach in the war on drugs to reduce demand in consuming nations and promote alternative development in supply countries while disrupting trafficking routes.

"Drug trafficking does not respect borders," he said. "Most of all, it does not respect people. It is a menace to the health of societies and individuals alike. It is associated with horrific abuse of women in particular. Those who run trafficking operations are ruthless and often murderous. We must pursue them and thwart them with the full force of the law and international resolve."

With a set of maps Mr. Costa underscored "new worrying development" in West and East Africa and across the Sahara, with cocaine pouring into the west, and 30 to 35 tons of Afghan heroin trafficked annually into the east, which is becoming "a free economic zone" for all sorts of trafficking, whether drugs, migrants, guns, natural resources or hazardous waste, mainly due to the chaotic situation in Somalia.

Meanwhile the two illicit streams are meeting in the Sahara, creating new trafficking routes across Chad, Niger and Mali, with cocaine and heroin becoming a new sort of currency, being traded at par.

Moreover, the recent discovery of seven laboratories in Guinea shows that West Africa is also becoming a producer of the synthetic drug amphetamine and of crystal cocaine refined from the base paste.

"Drug trafficking in the region is taking on a whole new dimension. In the past, trade across the Sahara was by caravans. Today it is larger in size, faster at delivery, and more high-tech," Mr. Costa said, citing the debris of a Boeing 727 jet found last month in the Gao region of Mali, an area plagued by insurgency and terrorism.

"It is scary that this new example of links between drugs, crime and terrorism was discovered by chance following the plane crash," he added, calling on the Council to set up a trans-Saharan crime monitoring network to share intelligence, watch for suspicious activity and strengthen regional efforts.

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